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Hours worked recover to pre-COVID level

Media Release

Released 15/04/2021

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, March 2021](#)

Seasonally adjusted employment increased by 71,000 people between February and March 2021 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Employment and hours worked

Bjorn Jarvis, head of labour statistics at the ABS, said this latest data showed continued recovery in the labour market into March 2021, with hours worked higher than March 2020, for the first time during the COVID period.

“Employment and hours worked in March 2021 were both higher than March 2020, up by 0.6 per cent and 1.2 per cent.”

“In March 2021, 62.6 per cent of people over 15 were employed, which was higher than March 2020 (62.4 per cent). The proportion of women employed was the highest it’s ever been (58.5 per cent), half a percentage point higher than in March 2020, while the proportion of men employed remained slightly lower than before the pandemic (66.8 per cent, compared with 67.0 per cent in March 2020).”

Western Australia’s recovery from the lockdown in the first week of February was evident in a 2.4 per cent (33,000 people) increase in employment, and a 9.2 per cent increase in hours worked – the strongest across all state and territories.

The data was collected during the first half of March, prior to the end of JobKeeper on 28 March.

“The April Labour Force release, along with weekly payroll jobs data, will show the state of the labour market after the end of JobKeeper,” Mr Jarvis said.

Hours worked and employment index, Seasonally adjusted (March



Participation, unemployment and underemployment

The participation rate increased by 0.2 percentage points to a historic high of 66.3 per cent, with the female participation rate increasing 0.4 percentage points to a historic high of 61.8 per cent and the male participation rate decreasing slightly to 70.9 per cent.

Unemployment decreased by 27,000 people in March and the unemployment rate declined by 0.2 percentage points to 5.6 per cent. The unemployment rate remained 0.4 percentage points above March 2020, around 62,000 more unemployed people.

The youth unemployment rate declined by 1.1 percentage points to 11.8 per cent, underpinned by an increase in the number of employed young women, up by 28,000 people (following a 31,000 increase in February).

Underemployment decreased by 0.6 percentage points to 7.9 per cent in March which is below pre-pandemic level and continued to reflect some unseasonal changes in hours worked during the first few months of 2021.

The underutilisation rate, which combines unemployment and underemployment, decreased by 0.8 percentage point to 13.5 per cent. This was 0.5 percentage points below March 2020, and 6.6 percentage points below its peak in May 2020.

Today's release includes additional information on how people without work at the end of JobKeeper may be reflected in April Labour Force statistics, analysis of hours worked, including people working zero hours, and an analysis of employment and hours worked at state and territory level. An article on the small number of people who work one hour a week is also included.

Further information, including regional labour market information, will be available in the upcoming March 2021 issue of [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release\)](#), due for release on Thursday 22 April 2021.

The ABS would like to thank Australians for their continued support in responding to our surveys during such a difficult time.

Media notes

- People in the Labour Force are either employed, or unemployed. In order to be unemployed, people must be actively looking for work, and available to start work during the reference week.
- The 'youth' age group refers to 15-24 year-olds.
- The numbers in the media release are rounded to the nearest thousand people. For more detailed numbers see the data downloads tab in the [Labour Force, Australia \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release\)](#) publication.
- The ABS has suspended publishing trend series for the COVID-19 period.
- The impact of the end of JobKeeper is not reflected in the March 2021 release, as the reference weeks for the March data were the first two weeks of March. For possible outcomes of the end of JobKeeper, please refer to [Survey impacts and changes \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/mar-2021#survey-impacts-and-changes\)](#).
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